

Fire of Youth—by Henry James Forman

Continued from Last Sunday
CHAPTER XIX. (Cont'd).

Pride and Love.

MARRIAGES have a way of letting in the cold light of realism even on the most incredibly romantic yesterdays. But the following morning, which broke warm and brilliant, still bore the magical light that shines only upon happiness. To each of the young women the day was like the glorious beginning of eternity, because they felt with their souls rather than with their senses. But in each of them a certain impatience was discernible. They sipped their coffee in their kimonos and were deliciously aware of the meaning of Paradise. Nevertheless, Adela was wondering whether her letter had reached its destination or how far it was on its way and how soon she might hope for a reply. For this Anthony would reply she had no doubt whatever, in spite of the humility she had expressed.

Clarice, with growing impatience, was waiting for word from Douglas. She kept furtively consulting her watch. By ten o'clock Douglas telephoned that he would be there in twenty minutes.

"Goodness gracious!" cried Adela in alarm and rushed madly through her toilet. Clarice followed suit with more painstaking care but with an equal accompaniment of flurry.

"I am going out," announced Adela, putting on her hat. "I shan't be back till late this afternoon. Then we can talk over plans," and hastily kissed the bride.

"Wait a moment, child!" protested Clarice. "That isn't at all necessary. Let's arrange—" But Adela, laughing, had fled the room and flew like a whirlwind down the stairs.

Douglas appeared two minutes later. Speech between them seemed the most obvious mutuality, a poor and profitless device of the human race for purely prosaic purposes. They had a form of communication so vastly superior that it was long before Clarice, with her head in the crook of his arm and looking up into his eyes, finally whispered:

"What did your mother say?"

Douglas did not answer.

"What did she say?" persisted Clarice, twisting her fingers in his hair.

"Oh, she hit the ceiling," answered Douglas, smiling ruefully. Clarice winced.

"What did the ceiling do to her?" she retorted. Then they both broke into tense, nervous laughter.

"You see mother has a weak heart," he explained. "She took to her bed right away—Lord! What a night! The doctor—smelling salts—tears. Thank Goodness I had sense enough to marry you first—and tell her afterward." His face was troubled and Clarice now perceived that he had rings of fatigue under his eyes. She put her arm about his neck.

"Just why does she hate me so?" demanded Clarice with passionate protest.

"Oh, it isn't you, darling—it isn't you she hates."

"Just the idea of your being married?"

"Well—yes—and no," he stammered, reddening.

"Out with it, Douglass," she commanded with clear-voiced firmness. "It will have to come out." She was more like her everyday self now.

"I'm ashamed to tell you," he murmured.

"But you've got to, Douglass," she pinched his cheek.

"Well—then—this is it: Mother is the best mother in the world—but she's daffy on one subject. She's got money on the brain—that is the only place she's got it, worse luck."

He paused. Then summoning new resolution, he blurted out:

"She's always been crazy to have me marry a rich girl," and his ears were red—"or at least a girl with some money. She always talked about it until I was sick of it—and I never cared for a single one of those pedigreed heifers she showed me—I never cared for any one," he continued in pathetic justification, "until I met you."

"And I married you!" he added explosively with a look of stubborn pride.

A peal of laughter greeted his words and with surprised eyes he looked down to see the beloved face in his arms contorted with merriment and shaking against his bosom. Clarice laughed and laughed until the tears blinded her eyes. Douglas was troubled, alarmed.

"Hysterical!" he reflected.

"But listen, sweetheart!" he protested rapidly. "These weren't my views, don't you see? I couldn't stand that talk—sick of it—I—"

Clarice placed her strong, soft hand on his lips.

"Wait a minute," she said, "wait, Douglass. How much money would your mother's ideal have to have—did she ever say—?"

"Yes!" burst out Douglas contemptuously. "Ten thousand a year—something like that—make a beautiful home—ten thousand—But what do I care? She needn't have ten cents—I want to work for the girl I marry—I want to work for you—you see!—work all my life—" and he emphasized his

phrases each with a hug that nearly crushed Clarice.

"Give me a chance to speak—young he-bear," she gasped, pushing against him with her hand.

"If that is all," she continued slowly—"why, I—I have ten thousand a year, Douglass—and more."

"You! Ten thousand! What are you talking about, Clarice Nash!" he breathed in consternation, and his face was gray with pallor. "You have—good Heavens—why did you marry me?—You don't think I knew, Clarice?"

"No! stupid boy, I know you didn't. That's one reason I lo—I rather like you," she tantalized him.

"Clarice!" he said dazedly—"you might as well tell me—how rich are you?"

"Well—I don't know exactly, Douglass," she spoke gently now and with some gravity, "but it's more than ten—or than twenty—or than thirty—it's the income from nearly two millions."

"Help!" he cried, recovering from his stupor and with a sort of oblique grin on his face. "Help!—and mother wanted to steer me to a rich girl!"

"You see you can't escape your destiny, boy," murmured Clarice, and, in effect, she marveled at the ways of that god or goddess—whatever the sex of destiny might be.

"I say, Clarice—let's go to her," suddenly urged Douglas. "She's a good old mother—has that one quirk—now we can buck her up

anyway. How did you manage to keep yourself dark, Clarice," he inquired suddenly—"keep your money under a bushel?"

"I managed," said Clarice enigmatically, "so that I might take in a goose-boy like you."

An hour later Clarice, in her best hat, with a whimsical smile on her face, was waiting alone in Mrs. Nash's diminutive parlor-dining room, the while Douglas was "breaking the news" to his mother concerning the redeeming features of Clarice. Douglas had done his work. Mrs. Nash, with her hand still hovering over the region of her fluttering heart, must have beheld on the ceiling one of those ineffable visions of the spiritual city, theologians sometimes describe in their holy books—the streets of gold and the gates of pearl. For with her eyes gazing ecstatically upward, she was murmuring over and over:

"Two million!—my darling boy!—his mother's own boy—my dar-

ling—two million—two million—after all these years—I knew you'd do it!—oh, bring her to me—I remember—she is beautiful!—two million!"

Mrs. Nash's recovery was rapid!

CHAPTER XX.

A Discovery.

ADELA was alone in the studio. The newly wedded couple, still on their brief honeymoon journey, were expected to return within a day or two.

How easily happiness had come to them, reflected Adela! There are times when we look down on those whose felicity comes too smoothly. A vagrant notion of this kind now kept thrusting itself into Adela's thoughts, but loyally she brushed it aside. She rejoiced in the happiness of her friend Clarice—strange how it had come about—and Douglas was a dear boy—but compared with Anthony!

A restlessness that was like

hang, up the receiver, when the switchboard girl at Liggett's finally informed her that the War Department was the only address they had.

She fell back from the telephone with the somber bitterness of one who had counted on disappointment.

Anthony—her Anthony! How easily she had lost him! By dint of sheer narrowness and stupidity she had hurled him from her. The bitterness of it! He had not even tried to excuse himself. That fact hung in her mind for an incredible space, as though her faculties were too paralyzed to think of anything

else. Then suddenly she cried aloud:

"Oh, why did I tear up his note that day?" With a sudden start it came to her—he had not tried to excuse himself. Indeed, had he not virtually confessed to something? She could not remember his words. But that he said he had meant to tell her everything, that he surely admitted her feeling was just—that much she remembered definitely. What did he mean?

All that he had done for Grace Thomas, far from being a misdeed, was heroic. Was Grace Thomas—could it be possible that she was lying?

No! a thousand times no! All her instinct defended Grace and sympathized with her. She had been spending many hours out of the many days with that young woman, and she could swear that Grace's attitude as regarded Anthony was beautiful. No guilt was possible there. What could he have meant, then? Oh, horrible thought—Anthony was admitting something else!

She went hot and cold in quick succeeding flashes, and then a creeping chill moved down her spine and enveloped her; she sat with clenched hands, the nails eating into her palms. Her gaze was turned inward. The light faded out of her environment, and once again she was a prey to the devastating fury of jealousy.



"I'm afraid I can never change my heart," said Adela as he kissed her hand, humbly, loyally, warmly.

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sharp pain gnawed at her soul. No answer had come from Anthony. Had he received her letter and scorned to reply? That would be no worse than she deserved. But she could not imagine it. That was not like Anthony. Her rooted instinctive belief in the nobility of his character, never entirely eclipsed, was now a permanent element in her thought of him.

She believed that Jim Howard might be in possession of Anthony's accurate address. To Jim Howard, however, she did not care to write for that information. She could not remain supine in her ignorance indefinitely and suddenly she took down the receiver and telephoned to Cass Liggett and Company. She evaded their queries as to her identity and was about to

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rest another moment without seeing her. Hastily she made her preparations and sped to the subway at Columbus Circle. What would she ask Grace? She did not know! Instinctively, however, she knew that her instruments and weapons were lying ready for use inside her heart and would be infallibly ready when she needed them. She needed no preparation.

She bought some flowers for Grace at a florist's near the subway exit and walked over to her apartment. Grace was just returning from the Park with her baby and Adela helped her to fold and carry the perambulator up the stairs. No luxurious elevators pampered the inhabitants here.

Searchingly, painstakingly, yet with infinite tact and art, Adela chatted lightly of half a dozen unrelated topics, until finally unobtrusively she was able, while seemingly thinking of something else, to plant the ingenious question.

"Did you see Mr. West often before you were married?"

"Oh, no!" laughed Grace, busying herself with her baby. "Mr. West—" she looked up brightly—"I guess he had other interests."

Her tone implied that Adela was doubtless a large part of those other interests—which Adela's heavy heart told her was untrue. She was silent for a space, then she observed:

"Yes, I suppose New York's full of 'interests.'"

Grace laughed, but without comment. She had her own reasons for not pursuing this conversation. And Adela bitterly told herself that during the past fortnight she had been living in a fool's paradise of her own creation.

The following morning, when she was barely dressed, there appeared at the door of her studio not Clarice, but Arthur Clark. His unexpected apparition gave her nerves a shock. She uttered a little cry of astonishment mingled with pleasure.

"The man from home?" laughed Clark with the shy confusion he always felt in the presence of Adela. "Sure to turn up."

"Come in, Arthur," she murmured in bewildered relief. "I'm so glad to see you." Her voice was vibrant with warm welcome—warmer perhaps than she intended in the depth of her misery.

"That's a good beginning, anyway," the young man laughed, nervously crushing his hand. He was a tall, somewhat raw-boned figure of a man, brown with outdoor life, square-featured with the honest, alert homeliness of a western farmer. "What brings me here? That's what you'd like to ask," he appended.

"I'm glad regardless," Adela answered, urging him with a gesture toward a chair. He fingered his soft straw hat nervously and all his facial muscles were in a state of commotion, as though he were apprehensive of not appearing at his best.

"It's the war," he brought forth with ill-concealed pride. "They wanted me to come to Washington—to the Department of Agriculture—there is use now for even a hayseed like me."

"How splendid!" cried Adela. "I should think you would be invaluable!"

He was thrilled by her enthusiasm. His horizon was limited, but Adela's voice and speech always seemed to extend it several degrees.

"I came by way of New York just to see you," he blurted out with a laugh. "I hope I'm not inopportune?"

Adela waved the suggestion aside.

"Will you have lunch with me?" he pressed on with a shy boldness in his honest gray eyes.

"With all the pleasure in the world, Arthur," was Adela's reassuring reply.

The brown color deepened on his skin, and his eyes shone. The beginning was vastly auspicious in his mind. He seemed as one to whom a fortune long dissipated and abandoned, suddenly, by some freak of fate, once again assumes a shape and substance.

They chatted agreeably of home, and people and laughed with the familiarity of old friendship. Always he was about to mention Anthony West, but something stronger than himself arose and prevented his utterance. Then he would quickly speak of other things. He had recently seen her mother and that brought a pang of conscience to Adela. She ought to be with her mother now. He had seen the Jim

That was it; there was something else. To have accused himself the way he did, just because he had done a fine thing for Grace—that was wholly unnecessary. Anthony would have been a fool to do that. That would not be heroic, but idiotic. And Anthony was no fool. What could it have been, she heard herself moaning piteously—oh, what could it have been? But her dark solitude yielded her no answer.

Was Grace shielding him? Did Grace know and did she conceal the fact? She looked at her watch. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. She must go to see Grace Thomas at once. She could not

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